

SPECULATION ON THE PRACTICE AND PROCESS OF ORGANIZATION
DEVELOPMENT IN "HOSTILE" ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Organization Development is a proven management technique around the world, successful in a wide variety of cultures and economic systems. The fact that Organization Development was born and raised in an environment (U.S.A.) somewhat different to its natural value system proves its universality applicability. However to be effective the field's processes and techniques must be adapted to “fit” the host country's values. In this spirit this paper speculates upon what the consultant faces when working in cultures with values hostile to Organization Development: Passive/Defensive and Aggressive/Defensive.

Organization Development, as a field, was “born and raised” in the United States, often times in and of itself a “hostile environment”. For most of its life in its native land organization development was treated as an “oddity” that few business executives understood, fewer still accepted, and the practice served primarily as a humorous plot line for many television sitcoms. Jaeger's (1986) landmark reworking of Hofstede's (1980) data supplied the explanatory proof for what many of us practitioners had intuitively known – Organization Development's “outcast” status was due to its counterculture foundation. Organization Development's core values (Feminine, Collectivist, Low Power Distance, Low Uncertainty Avoidance) differ from those of the dominant U.S. culture (Masculine, Individualist, Low Power Distance, Low Uncertainty Avoidance) on half the dimensions (Jaeger, 1986).

Interestingly, it is probably the very same cultural differences that make the U.S. a somewhat hostile environment for Organization Development that creates the need for, and

effectiveness of, this child from the “fringe elements”. Today Organization Development is generally accepted as an attractive and beneficial tool in corporate board rooms throughout the world (Sorensen, Head, Yaeger & Cooperrider, 2004). Some of the environments, such as Scandinavia (Sorensen, Head, Gironde & Larsen, 1997) possess values that match those of Organization Development perfectly, while some, such as Chile (Fuchs, 1987), are much more different than even the United States, with three or four conflicting values. Organization Development has also been proven an effective tool in the full range of economic development, from its “natural” environment of highly developed (Head, 2004) to the third world undeveloped economies (Golembiewski & Luo, 1994).

While Organization Development has worked all over the world, it is essential to avoid making the common mistake that it is practiced in the same manner world-wide. While Organization Development practitioners might use the same words, labels, and processes world-wide, that does not mean that these words, labels, and processes are identical in country-to-country. Significant differences in the design and implementation of interventions can easily be found if one only probes beneath the surface terminology, even for the most basic techniques (Head, Larsen, Neilsen & Sorensen, 1993). For those wishing to practice Organization Development in the global arena one must learn how to adjust and adapt one’s thinking and applications to “fit” the native environment, be it accepting or hostile.

Robert Cooke’s (Cooke & Lafferty, 1989) Organization Culture Inventory has proven itself a particularly useful model for understanding the need for local adaptations to Organization Development practices (Sorensen, P., Head, T., Golembiewski, R., Preston, J. & Larsen, H., 1996). Cooke’s instrument (designed to measure corporate culture) provides measurements for 12 independent cultural values. Using Cooke’s framework Organization Development appears much more compatible to the United States. Here, as with most “western” nations, Organization Development’s value set matches perfectly, emphasizing what Cooke labels as the *constructive values* of *achievement* (stress realistic but challenging goals which employees pursue enthusiastically), *self-actualizing* (value creativity, task accomplishment and individual growth, employees seek new and interesting activities), *humanistic/encouraging* (manage people in participative and person-centered manner,

members are open, supportive, and constructive with each other), and *affiliative* (desire constructive interpersonal relationships). However, there does exist two other sets of values that are not conducive to modern management practices, creating an “unnatural”, or “hostile”, environment to how Organization Development is traditionally practiced in its native environment. These eight values fall into two categories that Cooke identifies as *passive/defensive*, and *aggressive/defensive*.

Most Organization Development consultants are well versed in how their field operates in those nations with compatible value sets. Unfortunately, these same nations typically are most likely to possess a native group skilled in Organization Development, and they are clearly in the numerical minority among the nations of the world. These two factors combine to impose a significant reality upon those consultants seeking to extend their practices to the global arena – most of their opportunities will come from nations possessing a hostile (non compatible) environment for westernized Organization Development. The consultant can still be effective, but she must be prepared to adapt her practices, processes, and even thinking, to meet the different environmental demands. It is in this light that the following “speculation” occurs – how Organization Development operates in those cultures stressing the eight “non-conforming” values. This speculation is based upon equal parts of: our own practices, direct observations, research, others’ research, and (hopefully) logical inferences. We are not claiming infallibility, and fully acknowledge that other inferences can be proposed (and possibly may be more accurate). These suggestions are offered in the spirit of a “kicking off point”, a base with which discussion can be generated from a diverse set of practitioners that would ultimately result in the discovery of the “truth”.

PASSIVE/DEFENSIVE CULTURAL VALUES

APPROVAL

The approval value stresses the appearance of “harmony”. Disagreements and conflicts are consciously suppressed by all. An organization’s members believe they must agree with each other and everyone strives to liked by all others.

On the surface one could conclude that approval would be a very positive value for Organization Development. After all, the field was built upon the foundations of team building and sensitivity training. However the field was also built upon the knowledge that disagreement and conflict (heterogeneity) is the essential key to success for effective groups. Without disagreement synergy cannot be achieved. Team building and sensitivity training are tools that permit groups, and their leaders, to “tap into” and manage the conflict so as to lead to collaborative/maximizing processes and solutions.

In a culture that stresses the harmony value one would often experience dysfunctional dynamics such as Group Think, and the Abilene Paradox. Group discussions would not be fruitful as there would be no diversity of opinion, no alternative solutions suggested, and data collection/interpretation would involve a minimum search. Innovation would prove difficult as “initial inspirations” would be suppressed – members would not want to “upset the apple cart” by suggesting wild ideas that could be seen as controversial by their peers.

The organization in a harmony-stressing culture would be much more dependent upon the Organization Development consultant who, as an “outsider”, is the only one who could “safely” suggest innovative and/or differing ideas for the group to consider. The group would be expected to meet these “externally spawned” suggestions with two possible reactions: acceptance (if the consultant says what the first member to speak likes), or rejection as unacceptable to group (either politely rejected, or indirect – some cultures will never say “no”, but a “maybe” can be interpreted as a “no”). It is essential that the consultant must have solid, and noncontroversial reasons for all suggestions and that these be included at the time of the presentation. The more innovative a consultant’s suggestion is, the stronger the facts and logic supporting it must be. These same facts and logic must be seen as clearly flowing from data collected from the group itself. In this way the group can see that, while the suggestion might be innovative, at least it is supported by the group’s collective experiences.

The key to Organization Development's success is to focus upon the process, and not the potential outcome. First and foremost, group "approval" is required for all steps and interventions to be implemented - with formal votes of support a good idea. If presented correctly all the votes will be unanimous, but they will clearly establish that all the changes reflect the "will of the group". It is critical for the consultant to remember that the proposed ideas will not flow from the group itself (at least in the group meeting) but they must be supported by data that has.

Once the group sanctions an action/intervention, the consultant should implement the plan via utilizing the current organization chart or the use special task forces. In this way the changes can be seen as being compatible with the current system, or when that is not possible at least the result of internal group consensus. As change requires altering the status quo, the Organization Development consultant will find himself in the unusual position of being a "micromanager" – making sure that all the details are congruent and implemented. At the same time the consultant must have a strong internal leader/change champion to support her efforts. This would be the individual, clearly accepted and respected by the organization's members, who would speak up (and speak first) to highlight the change's positive elements. Clearly, the change efforts will be under the control of the consultant, as the internal champion would require an "out" should the suggestion prove unacceptable to the members. Therefore we're not really suggesting a partnership between the consultant and the champion (as is often the case in "traditional" environments), but rather more of a manager/"spin doctor" relationship.

CONVENTIONAL

The conventional cultural value is one that is obviously hostile to the traditional practice, and beliefs, of Organization Development. Cultures that emphasize the conventional value are extremely conservative, and they emphasize traditions – both in terms of practices and thinking. Organizations will be highly bureaucratic, and the members are expected to conform and follow rules. More importantly, the members find such behavior as both

desirable and comforting. Clearly this is not a value that supports a process, such as Organization Development, that strives to “bust” mechanistic thinking and encourage organic structures.

Clearly the Organization Development consultant’s primary problem when working in a conventional culture is to facilitate change – but stay reliant and “true” with past organizational practices. Innovation and new ideas are not likely to be openly accepted or supported. While the lower level employees might actually enjoy such changes, support will never be found among the managerial ranks.

Any changes that might be accepted would have to be planned out in extreme detail. Everything that will occur, step by step, must be spelled out – there will be no “winging it”. It is also important that the change presented to employees as a “done deal” in total, with an emphasis on the new rules, descriptions, and policies. There is nothing to be discussed, no feedback needed. Logic dictates modifications to the current system, and skilled experts diagnosed and solved the issues. Also quite contrary to the way in which Organization Development is typically practiced is that when the changes are presented to the employees the announcement should not include any mention of the anticipated end results or new vision. First, identifying these could create psychological discomfort and insecurity – the trusted and loved traditions are dysfunctional? Change of outcomes/vision also highlights the potential uncertainty and deadly “what if” questions. The employees know what the current, comfortable, system brings in all conditions, but nothing about the “unknown”. By only addressing the actual specific changes the employees will most likely simply put them into the context of “minor adjustments” and fine tuning the current system. Finally, in a bureaucracy the individual members have no need (or desire) to understand the “big picture”. Each is to focus on his/her own individual task and small part.

What is perhaps, on the surface, an apparent contradiction Organization Development’s newest innovation, appreciative inquiry, would most likely prove highly successful and desirable in conventional cultures. The appreciative inquiry process emphasizes what is best with the organization, and what has worked well in the past. This would be both comforting

and desirable to tradition bound cultures finding themselves in need of change. Any changes/interventions developed from the data is most likely to be seen as consistent with the current system and involve only a “recapturing” of a previous, more effective (albeit possibly brief) “status quo”. Appreciative inquiry is a technique that permits the individuals to focus exclusively upon their own activities – simply repeating those past actions that made them most comfortable and effective.

In a conventional culture the change process is entirely dependent upon the CEO, from recognizing the need for change, establishing what interventions are to be used, and through the overseeing of all the change efforts. The Organization Development consultant’s job is to draw out the CEO’s ideas and then “flesh them out” into practical processes. Here the consultant simply collects data and presents it to CEO. Data interpretation, by the consultant, is only performed when it is specifically requested. This does not mean the consultant is an organizational “yes” man. She is expected by the CEO to “tell it like it is”, but is wise to convey this knowledge as diplomatically as possible. The Organization Development consultant in this culture is not an equal “participant”, but rather an information analyst/conduit for the CEO.

DEPENDENT

Cultures that emphasize the dependent value are antithetical to that of Organization Development’s traditional practices and beliefs. These cultures encourage highly autocratic management practices and systems, and emphasize hierarchically controlled organizations. Employees do only what they are told and only when they are told to do it. Not only is this blind obedience considered the norm, the employees expect and desire it. Clearly Organization Development, in almost any conceivable format, would prove a very “hard sell” in such a culture.

The Organization Development consultant’s sole role in a dependent value culture is clearly to serve only as a “tool” of/for the executive. The CEO is in complete control of any

and all change activities and will make all the decisions. Both the CEO and the employees view the consultant as either a paid advisor who can be listened to or ignored, or a set of spare hands (hired gun) for the CEO to order about. In this environment the successful (in terms of retaining employment) consultant should simply provide a clear cut, fact based, conservative set of recommendations to the CEO and be prepared for answering any questions. Data interpretation, inferences, and conclusions should be left up to the CEO unless specifically requested, and then only within the boundaries established by the CEO.

In a dependent culture the employees would be very reluctant to participate at any step in the change process. This would even include such basic data sources as employee surveys, or even “suggestion boxes”. Employees are accustomed to be ordered about and/or ignored. This is the role they are both expecting and comfortable with. As mentioned earlier, the workers perceive the consultant as a hired gun and/or direct conduit to the CEO, and therefore it would very difficult for the consultant to establish an image of impartiality and externality, and be perceived as someone who would respect the workers’ anonymity. Any information the employees do provide to the consultant will be indirect and in the form of innuendo and rumor – carefully thought out as to what message they desire to be conveyed to the CEO. “I don’t think this way, but I hear that some believe...” is the most the consultant is likely to hear from the employees.

Implementation plans could be something the CEO delegates to the consultant, but the CEO clearly is seen by all as the one who is in control of the process. A good analogy would be the old western movies where the “boss” tells the gunman to terrorize the landowners but leaves it up to the “muscle” as to exactly how this should be done.

The implementation of any changes will clearly follow the organizational chart, both in terms of cause and effect. The actual changes would not be permitted to involve significant changes to the organization’s structure and culture. Change efforts will most likely involve small, simple modifications to existing practices. The change process will flow from the top and be introduced through the chain-of-command in terms of orders limited to the individual employee’s narrow scope of responsibility. As one can see even here the Organization

Development consultant is viewed as an outsider with no real role, influence, or freedom of action. This isn't a very rewarding position for the consultant, and just as with the western movies, the hired gun often resents both the position and being treated as mindless, but barely accepts it because the "money is good".

AVOIDANCE

The avoidance value results in organizations that punish mistakes, but rarely reward successes. Therefore employees will strive to avoid responsibility at all costs. If one is not responsible, one cannot be held accountable. The organization will adopt a "pass the buck" norm where one first and foremost retains the ability to shift responsibility and blame for anything that might happen to others. If one does find it impossible to avoid being in a position of authority, one will tend to be very conservative in all decision making, to the point of putting off all decisions as long as possible, and then only relying upon past experiences. Recall that the goal here is not to succeed, only to avoid outright failure.

Organization Development consultants working in a culture that stresses avoidance must always remember that their client is not looking for any type of maximization outcome. Rather the client will clearly be in a satisficing mode, where the first solution that meets a pre established set of criteria is the one to be used. These criteria will not be very rigorous or challenging. The consultant should not attempt anything that will "stretch" the organization, as those activities increase the likelihood of failure.

In a related vein, the client organization will most likely have a very short time-frame for any change efforts. At the first sign of difficulty the client will "jump ship". Again, one doesn't need to establish success, only to avoid any hint of failure. Unfortunately inherent in almost all Organization Development projects is the concept of "lag time" – where the change first disrupts the workplace before its benefits start up. Premature cessation of any change effort is a definite factor that any consultant must anticipate and plan for. This may not be as onerous as it sounds. The consultant in an avoidance culture can also find that her client

actively discourages evaluation of any form. One result of an environment where success is ignored and failure is punished is simply that if one doesn't measure any outcomes, then failure can never be established, and as long as no one cares about success there is no compelling reason to evaluate. Granted, the consultant is an external agent with whom the organization would have no issue in laying blame, but ultimately the consultant is hired by someone internally. Hiring an expensive consultant who failed is in and of itself a major mistake which would be punished severely.

On the positive side, the avoidance culture provides the consultant with a significant amount of autonomy to analyze and act. However if the consultant attempts to seek formal sanctions from anyone/group for proposed activities/interventions (as is typically the case in Organization Development) the entire process will be ground to a halt. The client does not want to accept "ownership" of the change process, for that shifts the responsibility internally. One of the key reasons the client, in the avoidance culture, hires an external consultant is to shift as much of the potential blame for what might happen to an outsider.

To mix one's metaphors, this means that the change "ball" is entirely in the consultant's court, and he faces a definite "sink or swim" proposition. The consultant should act as a benevolent dictator, but one that knows he/she could lose his/her head quickly at the first sign of trouble. The consultant must clearly accept full responsibility for any and all change recommendations. At the same time, she/he should never take credit for the success, but distribute it to the entire "team". The consultant will "tell" the group what to do, when to do it, and so forth. This provides everyone with the "fall guy" they need to act. Resistance is actually unlikely, as that would place the resistor in the position of being labeled the barrier to the change. At the same time no one will, at least publically, embrace the change in word or action.

Contrary to what every Organization Development consultant is taught, in an avoidance value dominated culture, one must be willing to act without any support of top management. The executive's credible public deniability must be maintained above all else. The consultant must expect to assume all responsibility. In an interesting way, this shift of responsibility

means the executive will place great emphasis on selecting the consultant in the first place. The executive will go to great lengths to select a highly experienced consultant with a long track record of not making mistakes. However the selection process will not simply focus upon the consultant's proven ability, but also her willingness to not put the executives in a position of risk. Given traditional Organization Development's norm of client ownership and involvement in the entire change process this later criterion will make finding a willing consultant problematic.

"Forget employee participation and involvement" is the key rule for Organization Development efforts in the avoidance culture. While such activities in this situation are possibly of greater desirability for the consultant (as they would permit him a shift of blame in the case of failure), the employees will avoid them at all costs (for the same reason). The consultant, contrary to many of our real natures, must remain very conservative in our recommendations. "Take no risk" is another key rule in this environment. Only well established interventions, with a long track record of success, are likely to be accepted without facing crushing resistance.

In such a culture the Organization Development consultant finds that traditional diagnosis techniques impossible to use, as they require some form of employee participation. No one will ever acknowledge personal difficulties or problems, but will be all too happy to point to others' (especially political enemies') faults. This creates a highly political operating theater, in the worst sense of the term, for assessing the situation using traditional diagnostic tools. However, once again in a surprising twist, such a culture creates an excellent set of conditions for appreciative inquiry. The employees are more than willing to point out personal successes, as they have no fear of punishment, and might also be seeking any kind of psychic rewards for them in place of the more tangible rewards they know will not come.

With the real possibility of using appreciative inquiry in the avoidance value dominated culture, there is an opportunity to make some cultural changes (if one accepts that this is not the most desirable environment for a modern organization), and it lies with the fact that successes are not rewarded. By building in official rewards for success in the change effort's

plans (be they individual or group-based dependent upon the culture being individualist or collectivist), it is possible that the employees and management could perceive the personal benefits of at least that aspect of contemporary management theory. This could lay the groundwork for ultimately adopting the achievement value.

AGGRESSIVE/DEFENSIVE CULTURAL VALUES

OPPOSITIONAL

Possibly the worst possible culture, for Organization Development, imaginable is one that possesses the oppositional cultural value. In this environment confrontation and negativity is the norm. Everyone is highly critical of each other and quickly attack all suggestions and ideas proposed by anyone. While many of us have actually worked in such organizations, we must remember that most likely these were the very conditions we were hired to change. In this culture not only are these hostile (to Organization Development at least) conditions are the norm, they are considered highly desirable. It is impossible to imagine Organization Development (in any form) operating under such conditions.

Any type of change effort will be difficult, if not impossible, in an oppositional value dominated culture. Each individual will only accept those change efforts that is perceived as coming from him/herself personally, and everyone is sure to develop a different idea from each other. Even if the consultant finds two people who agree, once they discover the agreement both will change their mind to something else. To dispel anyone's doubt of such a scenario, let us share an incident that took place while one served as a department head. Two of my faculty members approached me individually complaining about the course they were always scheduled to teach. Each one stated they would much prefer to teach the course the other one covered (incidentally neither of these individuals liked the other). Both were equally qualified to teach both courses. So I simply implemented a "win-win" scenario and switched their teaching assignments. Everything was fine until professor A overheard professor B talking about how much he looked forward to teaching the "new" class.

Professor A immediately went to the Dean complaining about the change and insisted it be reversed. I asked Professor A if he really would prefer to teach a course that he dislikes rather than teach a course he himself said he would enjoy simply to keep Professor B from also being happy? The response was literally, and simply, "Of course."

In such an environment the consultant will be perceived by all as simply another enemy, and trust will be impossible to establish. The consultant's own suggestions will not be accepted publically by the employees or by the CEO. The suggestions might be accepted privately but only if it confirms exactly what she/he believed in the first place. No one will ever agree on what the problem is, or even if there is a problem. In the unlikely event that the consultant actually gets to the stage of recommending changes, the group will find faults with everything proposed. Even in the situation where a suggestion has no problems/issues the group will create them by creating impossible "what if" scenarios – "What would happen if space aliens would take over the minds of the entire Board of Directors?" In the opposition influenced culture, the consultant is only hired to be the "fall guy", the focus of blame as to why the change project (proposed for political reasons only) was ultimately rejected. The Organization Development consultant should run, not walk, away from this situation. If one has a thick skin the compensation might prove attractive, after all one only goes through the motions, the reputation damage far outweighs the monetary gains.

POWER

Organizations created with a dominant power value are highly autocratic and very non-participative. There is a rigid adherence to the hierarchy at all times. In such an environment individual members will want to take charge and control their subordinates, but interestingly will "cow tow" (unquestioningly obey) to their superiors. Contrary to what many might think (given the desire to dominate) such complete obedience is not resented, it is considered natural and right, just as one would find in a high power distance culture.

This environment is full of contradictions for any change effort. The Organization Development consultant working in a Power culture would be very comfortable with the accepted belief that all changes must be top down, although the lack of reverse involvement might prove worrisome. All aspects of any change effort (from diagnosis through evaluation) would have to be imposed upon the members without any consideration for their ideas, beliefs or feelings. However minimum resistance is guaranteed, as such actions are the inherent right of management. The employees are all too willing to engage in any change activities required of them, but would be very uncomfortable actually participating in anything more than the most objective diagnostic data collection.

Many of Organization Development's traditional interventions would prove ineffective in such cultures, as they are based upon the principles of empowerment, participation and organic structures. For example job enrichment, (traditional) management-by-objectives, and the socio-technical systems, interventions would all be undesirable.

At the same time the Power value dominated culture would find other traditional Organization Development interventions as highly effective. For example team building and many conflict resolution techniques, because they are "peer level" focused would prove highly desirable. Recall that the members all seek to be promoted so they can exercise power over more subordinates. So anything that would make the individuals more effective in their current positions, so as to increase the probability of promotion, is seen as attractive and will receive active support.

A very "thick skin" is a prerequisite for any consultant looking to operate in the power environment. The CEO is used to acting in dictatorial manner with no impunity. First, this means it is very unlikely that he would hire a consultant in the first place as it could be seen as evidence of weakness or fallibility. The CEO will constantly try to "second guess" the consultant, questioning any proposals, interpretations, or assumptions. At the same time for the consultant to be effective at all she must establish herself as an "equal" to the CEO – someone whose specialized knowledge places one on the same level as the CEO. Part of this means the consultant is expected to "be true to oneself" and defend one's thoughts

against any and all criticisms the CEO might level. In essence the consultant will constantly find the CEO wanting to “put him in his place” as a lower level player, but will immediately dismiss (psychologically) anyone who acts submissive in any manner what-so-ever.

Developing a working partnership between consultant and CEO is the key for success in this environment, as this is where all the change diagnosis and planning will take place. Once the change plans and goals have been established, then the consultant (or the CEO) will implement them utilizing the chain of command with each manager being charged with overseeing the change efforts as they specifically relate to her/his own unit. There will be discretionary flexibility permitted, with the exact amount established by the descending order of the hierarchy. This discretionary flexibility does not mean that the consultant would look for any participation or involvement with regards to what will change, or why it will change. Rather it provides the various managers with the decision of how it will change, in a very narrow focused manner.

PERFECTIONIST

The culture that emphasizes the perfectionist value is one where hard work is rewarded. This culture expects perfection from everyone, and therefore above all else mistakes must be avoided at all costs. Any action that appears risky will be avoided at all cost, as by definition risk means there is an inherent chance of failure. The perfectionist value driven culture places its emphasis on the “means” (process) and never the “end” (goal) – if one works correctly and diligently the desired results will come.

The perfectionist culture would prove the ideal situation for many consultants – those who are lesser qualified, experienced, or effective as evaluation (either by self or client) will never be required. As long as there is no evaluation to prove otherwise everyone can always assume success. Management won't encounter career ending possibility of hiring a non successful consultant. If there is an evaluation the entire focus will be on people “enjoying” and believing in the process – another excellent situation for appreciative inquiry (as

practiced by many). Appreciative inquiry creates a highly enjoyable experience providing self-affirmation for all, but all-too-often, the process is aimless (without directed purpose) as it was performed solely to make people feel good and not to make an organization more effective.

The key for true organization development success would involve the consultant to “tap into” the process focus by convincing all that the proposed changes would lead to both a “better way of doing things” and simultaneously decreasing the possibility of failure. In theory this should not be difficult as this is exactly what Organization Development was created to accomplish. However in practice it can prove much more difficult. The populace possessing a perfectionist value will generally reject innovation and new ideas. These individuals know exactly what to do, and what not to do, under their current system. They don’t know either set of parameters under a proposed innovation and will tend to flee from the scenario (no matter how attractive it might appear).

When the consultant does find its client willing to engage in change, caution must be taken to utilize only the most “tried and true” techniques. The members (quite literally all the members) can be expected to want to do their own research on any proposed intervention. They will only accept those where research provides overwhelming support and detailed explanations are available. Unfortunately this does eliminate much of what Organization Development does – not to say our techniques don’t work, but rather we are loathe to publish them and/or use convincing quantitative driven “proof”.

Any change effort will require detailed plans drawn out ahead of time – but with no “contingencies” included (at least on a formal level). Such “back up”, or contingent, plans imply a lack of confidence and a possibility of mistakes being made. Either possibility ensures that resistance to change is likely. The members want to know exactly what will happen (in terms of process not results) and what is expected of them ahead of time. Unfortunately this also means that the perfectionist culture promotes the paralysis-by-analysis condition where action is constantly delayed as the members constantly find “more research” is required.

Contrary to what one might think, resistance to change is actually not likely if the members are convinced of the need for change and the logical desirability of the proposed methods.

The Organization Development consultant will need a great deal of facts and figures to support all propositions, and must be prepared to respond to endless, but not necessarily hostile, set of questions. In such an environment employee involvement and participation is a two-edged sword. People will appreciate the need for data-driven analysis, and be more than willing to actively contribute to such activities, but if conflicting opinions or data are presented, or less than complete agreement received, doubts could be easily raised as to the desirability, or correctness, of the proposed plans.

In the perfectionist driven culture, as the need for change is evidence that problems exist in the organization, therefore evidence that shortcomings exist, management will be very reluctant to admit there is a need for change. There is a strong probability that the managing executives will attempt to “solve” the problem themselves without acknowledging it exists. Even when they are forced to acknowledge that a problem exists they will most likely try to avoid hiring an outside consultant, as such an action could be seen as recognizing the problem is “out of control”. Two conditions do exist under which management is likely to openly engage in the change process. The first is that a new executive is hired (most likely from an external source), so the problems are clearly not her/his making. The second is when the source cause of the need for change is clearly external to the organization, so that the executives can “lay the blame” for everything to a non organization entity.

CONCLUSION

Organization Development, as a field, has been successfully practiced world-wide. But this practice is not like the natural science spawned fields, like engineering and chemistry, that are based upon universally applied principles. While combining the exact same two chemicals in the exact same fashion will result in the exact same reaction whether one is in Houston or in Ho Chi Minh City, the same is not necessarily true with Organization Development. In order to be successful the global Organization Development practitioner must learn to adapt his methods to fit the realities imposed by the local cultures, the majority of which are quite hostile to the field as it traditionally practiced in its homeland.

What is presented here is a “jumping off point”, one person’s speculation on how Organization Development would need to be adjusted to be effective in hostile (those countries emphasizing values contradictory to those of traditional Organization Development) environments. The intention is that others, with different experiences and viewpoints, will step up and offer their own speculations, ultimately permitting the field to discover the “truth” through “conceptual triangulation” and solid empirical research. Why not simply “skip” to the empirical research? Quite simply one first must have some type of conceptual framework on which to establish one’s research questions and working hypotheses.

This is a challenge that the field cannot afford to ignore. We know that Organization Development can be quite effective in these environments, but now we need to develop the more critical knowledge bases – the why and the how. All too often Organization Development practitioners have jealously guarded their answers to these questions. This norm, the antithesis of what our field stands for, has forced practitioner after practitioner to “learn by doing”, and all too often “learn from her own mistakes”. This norm has retarded and severely damaged the field’s growth and reputation. If we are ever to reach the level of acceptability that our natural science brethren share, we must develop this knowledge and incorporate it into our educational and socialization practices.

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